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Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. On 9 December 1998, the General Assembly adopted resolution 53/126, in which it noted with concern that, despite all the efforts deployed so far by the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and others, the situation of refugees and displaced persons in Africa, especially in the West African and Great Lakes regions and in the Horn of Africa, remained precarious.

2. The General Assembly called upon the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other concerned entities to intensify protection activities by, *inter alia*, supporting the efforts of African Governments through appropriate capacity-building activities and by providing the necessary assistance to accelerate the enactment or amendment and implementation of legislation relating to refugees, appealed to Governments, the United Nations, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the international community to create conditions to facilitate the voluntary return in safety and with dignity and the early rehabilitation and reintegration of refugees; and appealed to the international community to respond positively, in the spirit of solidarity and burden-sharing, to the third-country resettlement requests of African refugees.

3. The General Assembly also requested all Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to pay particular attention to meeting the special needs of refugee women and children and displaced persons, including those with special protection needs; called upon UNHCR to make renewed efforts to ensure that the rights, needs and dignity of elderly refugees were fully respected; and called upon the Secretary-General, UNHCR and intergovernmental, regional and non-governmental organizations, in conjunction with States, to increase the capacity for coordination and delivery of humanitarian emergency assistance and disaster relief in respect of asylum, repatriation, rehabilitation and resettlement of refugees, returnees and displaced persons, including refugees in urban areas.

4. The present report is submitted pursuant to the General Assembly's request for a comprehensive report on the situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa to it at its fifty-fourth session taking fully into account the efforts expended by countries of asylum.

II. Action taken to implement General Assembly resolution 53/126

A. Overview

5. Some 15 African countries are currently embroiled in armed conflict, with negative effects on the efforts of Governments to foster stability and economic development for their peoples. Internal as well as external displacement of hundreds of thousands of individuals, many of them innocent civilian women and children, continue to occur. The African continent currently counts some 6 million persons of concern to UNHCR, namely, refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees. Most displacements have resulted from situations of poverty or conflict or a combination of both. The main refugee groups caused by recent crises continue to be over half a million Sierra Leoneans in West Africa, 280,000 Burundians in the United Republic of Tanzania and 180,000 Congolese who have fled the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to various countries. Movements have also occurred from the Republic of the Congo to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to Gabon. Owing to security problems affecting major returnee areas, the Liberian repatriation programme was interrupted and the planned repatriation of the 250,000 was put on hold.

6. There are also older, unresolved conflict situations that produced refugees many years ago: more than 370,000 Sudanese are still refugees in Ethiopia and Uganda; 165,000 Saharawi refugees are still in camps in Algeria and other countries; and there are 150,000 Angolan refugees, mostly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Tens of thousands of the latter were new arrivals fleeing fresh fighting in their country. In both Angola and the Sudan, as well as in war-torn areas on the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia, there are also tens of thousands of internally displaced people. In Liberia, where 280,000 refugees have returned home, there were hopes of finishing the repatriation of the remaining quarter of a million by mid-2000, provided conditions are safe.

7. Elsewhere, some situations have given signs of solution. Uppermost among them was Sierra Leone, where the Lomé Peace Agreement (S/1999/777, annex) offers hopes for a settlement. The end of the civil war in that country could bring a positive solution to the worst current refugee problem in Africa. Some 10 per cent of the entire population of Sierra Leone has fled violence and fighting in various waves in the past few years. Most of them took

refuge in Guinea and Liberia, which generously provided asylum despite their limited resources.

8. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, too, there were now hopes of peace. The signing of the Lusaka Agreement by all parties concerned is a welcome development that needs strong international support to allow its full implementation and to prevent further movements of population. In the meantime, UNHCR provides assistance to some 700,000 displaced persons in accessible areas inside the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while another group of over 180,000 refugees are assisted in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

9. Another pressing issue is that of Rwandan refugees who have not yet returned after fleeing their country in the aftermath of genocide. Large groups remain in the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is important for UNHCR to be given access to those requesting repatriation, to enable the Office to resume support for Rwandan refugees still in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rwandan refugees in the Republic of the Congo are also in need of assistance and discussions are under way to address their needs.

10. Prospects for Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania, on the other hand, seemed less promising. Pending a positive outcome to peace talks in Arusha, refugee repatriation movements were limited to a few individuals per day. Other situations of conflict and displacement offering little hope for early solutions included the Angolan conflict, which continues to push thousands of people to flee their homes. The war in southern Sudan — one of the oldest and most violent conflicts in the world — also continued to produce untold suffering. Another situation warranting attention was the civil war in the Republic of the Congo. Thousands of inhabitants have been compelled to flee in recent months and are living in conditions of great precarity.

11. Even in situations where peace is secured, there remains the need for measures that would consolidate peace after fighting has ceased for the benefit of those returning to their homes. This helps narrow the dangerous gap between the provision of humanitarian assistance and that of longer-term development cooperation. A striking example of this need is to be found in Rwanda, where returnees make up some 25 per cent of the entire population.

B. Regional overviews

12. The regional overviews that follow focus on main developments since the last report to the General Assembly (A/53/328), and mention major contributions from various agencies of the United Nations system that complement the work of UNHCR.

1. Great Lakes

13. The situation in the Great Lakes region is characterized by continued volatility, with hopes for solutions followed by setbacks, often engendering new waves of population movements. As of June 1999, the United Republic of Tanzania was accommodating the largest number of refugees, with almost 280,000 Burundian, 110,000 Congolese and 5,000 Rwandan refugees in camps. Hopes pinned on the Arusha peace process were dashed by the upsurge of rebel attacks in Burundi in areas previously considered safe, creating a new refugee movement that outnumbered the returns. By June, the increasing number of Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania was putting a strain on reception and transport facilities. Meanwhile continued arrivals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo were stretching the capacity of existing camps. With little prospect of rapid solutions for either of those groups, care and maintenance assistance continued to be provided by UNHCR.

14. In Burundi, the optimism that accompanied the lifting of regional sanctions in January 1999 and improved relations between Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania gave way to disappointment as insecurity spread to provinces bordering Tanzania. The return movements dwindled (only 6,000 between January and June), while departures increased. Efforts focused once more on protection and life-sustaining activities, while programmes with a longer-term perspective of facilitating reintegration of returnees were cut back.

15. As a result of the conflict in the Republic of the Congo, a continuous influx of refugees arrived in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, most of them in extremely poor condition and severely undernourished. The lack of access to refugees due to the particularly complex situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the prevailing insecurity continues to be of major concern. Arrangements for temporary relief assistance were made, as the vast majority are keen to repatriate as quickly as possible. Given the positive signs of a rapid denouement of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a result of the Lusaka Agreement, UNHCR has drawn up an emergency

preparedness plan in the eventuality of a massive repatriation movement. However, it needs to be emphasized that repatriation at the end of a conflict cannot be sustained unless it is accompanied by complementary measures to restore security, law and order, peace and the socio-economic well-being of returnees. Following a tripartite agreement signed in April by UNHCR with the Governments of the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, repatriation has been under way, although logistics and security-related problems have delayed progress.

16. On the initiative of the rebel authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and facilitated by a local non-governmental organization, Rwandan refugees began to repatriate in June from North and South Kivu. Once it was clear that the movement was voluntary, UNHCR stepped up its involvement. Further west, in Kasi and Equator provinces, the rebel advance resulted in a number of Rwandan refugees leaving the forest in search of greater safety. In both areas UNHCR provided limited assistance. As the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo deteriorated, Burundian refugees began to repatriate in May 1999. In addition to formidable operational constraints, UNHCR has had to face serious protection problems, such as determining the voluntariness of return and problems of access.

17. With the assistance of other relevant international bodies and organizations, UNHCR and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat have been focusing on meeting that particular challenge. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, negotiations regarding access were entered into with the Government and the rebel authorities as a pre-condition to humanitarian aid. The principles of engagement for humanitarian assistance were endorsed by the Government in Kinshasa and by the opposition, setting out the basic operational guarantees of security and access for humanitarian organizations. In the Central African Republic, the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic (MINURCA) cooperated with the Government to ensure the peaceful surrender of weapons by rebels, thus creating a secure environment for the follow-up of humanitarian tasks, while at the same time acting as a deterrent to further military confrontation.

18. Steps were also taken by UNHCR and host Governments towards ensuring the security and civilian character of refugee camps. This was the aim in the United Republic of Tanzania when, in October 1998, 278 policemen and women and security liaison officers were deployed to the refugee camps; subsidies and material support were also provided to enable the police to exercise their responsibilities. In Kenya, support was provided to set up a mobile court near the refugee camps. In Rwanda, in collaboration with the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNHCR provided assistance to the judiciary towards the creation of an independent, fair and efficient system of justice, thus creating more confidence among the returnees. MINURCA played an active role in disarming some 6,000 elements of the Congolese army following their retreat from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Central African Republic.

19. Food assistance from the World Food Programme (WFP) in the Great Lakes region amounted in 1998 to over 420,000 tons, valued at close to $270 million. Beneficiaries (estimated at 1 million refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees) were mainly from Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. WFP assistance in the Republic of the Congo and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo amounted to over 10,000 tons, in each case valued at around $8 million.

20. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) played a leading role in coordinating assistance in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, establishing a United Nations humanitarian office in Goma in March 1999. Medical assistance was delivered to selected medical institutions serving internally displaced persons in Orientale and Kivu provinces. UNICEF has continued to support programmes for the identification, tracing and reunification of some 6,000 unaccompanied refugee children in North and South Kivu, Orientale, the Kasais, Katanga and Bas-Congo, in collaboration with UNHCR, ICRC and the Save the Children Fund (United Kingdom). According to a UNICEF survey, over half of all internally displaced persons in Burundi were children under the age of 16, and 56 per cent were female. UNICEF has supported therapeutic feeding activities for a monthly caseload of some 5,700 beneficiaries through the purchase and distribution of therapeutic milk, multi-vitamin mineral complexes and oral rehydration salts. Vaccination campaigns have included assisting with the distribution of vaccines and mobile vaccination activities, providing supplies of kerosene and equipment for the cold chain, as well as over 4.5 million doses of vaccines. In an effort to ensure that displaced and other children living in conflict-affected areas are not denied a primary school education, UNICEF has supported efforts by local communities to build and equip temporary schools and to repair existing classrooms by providing construction materials as well as financial and technical assistance. Emergency kits and school supplies have been made available to children displaced by violence; teacher training

programmes have been provided and training in peace education techniques. Water systems in camps for internally displaced persons and in local communities have been repaired through cooperation with UNICEF partners, while in emergency situations the Fund has provided water by truck and constructed temporary latrines. In camps for internally displaced persons, UNICEF has trained and equipped hygiene committees to teach improved hygiene and environmental sanitation.

21. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) activities in the Great Lakes region have included a community assistance umbrella programme in Burundi, designed to strengthen the efforts of rural communities to fully absorb returnees and contribute to social cohesion and the consolidation of peace in those communities. In Rwanda, UNDP is managing a trust fund of over $100 million from a number of donors. Again, the principal objective is community-level assistance that facilitates the reabsorption of community members, while in the Republic of the Congo, UNDP has become involved in an inter-agency umbrella programme that enrols thousands of young ex-combatants in reconstruction works in urban areas, where some 180,000 internally displaced persons are returning.

2. West Africa

22. Countries of West Africa currently host some 2.1 million refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR. By and large, prospects for durable solutions are encouraging, thanks to the extraordinary solidarity and support extended by West African States, despite the bleak economic situation faced by many of them.

23. Political situations in some parts of the region remain unstable. This is notably the case in Liberia, where an armed confrontation in April 1999 in Voinjama had a destabilizing effect, leading to additional displacements, while halting returns to Lofa county. Repatriation to other parts of the country continued, with the voluntary return of some 22,500 between January and June. The UNHCR presence and protection monitoring in main areas of return has allowed for an increased sense of security among refugees that is of vital importance to the stabilization process. In Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, UNHCR continued to provide protection and assistance to large numbers of refugees from Liberia, Sierra Leone and other countries. A census conducted in February in Guinea revealed that over 350,000 Sierra Leoneans currently resided in two provinces. In April, UNHCR launched a project to improve their safety by moving those in camps closest to the border to locations further inland. Over 14,000 persons have been transferred to date. The presence of large numbers of refugees in West Africa has led UNHCR to initiate small-scale environmental rehabilitation projects in affected areas. However, such initiatives require a concerted effort with others having expertise in this area.

24. In Sierra Leone, the Lomé Peace Agreement, signed between the Revolutionary United Front and the Government in July, has been an important and positive development, opening prospects for the gradual return of hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons to their homes. It is anticipated that this will take time, given the fragile security situation as well as limited access to main areas of return.

25. Another positive development has been the improved security situation in Guinea-Bissau as from May 1999. Since then most of the over 350,000 internally displaced persons have already returned to their homes with organized repatriation assisted by UNHCR for those having sought refuge in Cape Verde, the Gambia, Guinea and Senegal. In Mali and the Niger, efforts are focusing on consolidating the reintegration of returnees, combined with capacity-building. Elsewhere, notably in the Central African Republic, Chad and Gabon, the year has witnessed new refugee influxes resulting from conflict in the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan. Each of those movements has required an emergency response, pending longer-term solutions.

26. With the implementation of the Lomé Peace Agreement and the beginning of the demobilization and reintegration process, the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) declared its readiness to provide humanitarian agencies with the necessary support through security assessments, escorts and liaison functions. In the interim, the human rights section of UNOMSIL became active in monitoring human rights issues affecting internally displaced persons and made regular visits to camps for internally displaced persons and facilities for that purpose. It undertook two human rights monitoring missions during February and March 1999 to the refugee camps for Sierra Leonean refugees along the border between Guinea and Sierra Leone.

27. Food assistance from WFP in West African countries amounted to over 173 tons, valued at over $106 million. The estimated 1.8 million beneficiaries included refugees in Guinea, returnees in Liberia, displaced and war-affected persons in Sierra Leone, as well as refugees in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. In Mali, close to 15,000 tons of food aid were provided to 237,000 returnees, at a value of $13 million, while in Chad close to 30,000 refugees received 3,000 tons of food, costing $2.6 million.

28. In Sierra Leone, UNICEF has continued to coordinate and support programmes that target the special needs of over 3,000 abducted and war-affected children by tracing and family reunification, psycho-social programmes and planning for the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers as part of the peace process. UNICEF and its partners have also provided basic health care to both internally displaced persons and local populations. Diseases such as measles were combated by vaccination programmes covering over 70,000 children in areas with a large concentration of internally displaced persons where risks of epidemics were high. Supplies and training were provided for the construction and operation of water and sanitation facilities for 60,000 internally displaced persons, thus reducing the threat of cholera and other enteric diseases.

29. In Liberia, UNDP has delivered five programmes assisting communities, including returnees, in particular from neighbouring Sierra Leone, as well as many internally displaced persons. The programmes include physical rehabilitation of infrastructure, such as health clinics or schools; micro-credit and micro-grants for restoring livelihoods; vocational training and education, including training of 5,000 teachers.

3. East and Horn of Africa

30. The resumption of hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia late in 1998 dealt a tragic blow to hopes for peace and stability in the region. Not only did it cause population displacements in both countries, but it also had repercussions on internal conflicts in Somalia, leading to renewed hostilities in that war-torn country.

31. Recent mediation efforts by OAU, leading to the Framework Agreement and peace plan, thus represent a welcome development, reviving hopes for greater stability and a resumption of voluntary repatriation movements, which UNHCR has been promoting for a number of years. The main groups concerned are the Eritreans (mainly in the Sudan) and Somalis (of whom the largest groups are in Ethiopia and Kenya). Despite setbacks, some progress has been achieved in past months, with limited returns of Ethiopians from Kenya and of Somali refugees from Ethiopia to north-west Somalia, where conditions are considered safe. In each case, the return is coupled with measures such as quick impact projects to facilitate reintegration and ensure that the return is sustainable.

32. For the many thousands still languishing in camps in the region, efforts continue to meet basic needs through care and maintenance programmes and to strengthen refugee protection. In Kenya and Uganda, UNHCR has provided training for the police and security personnel in an attempt to help the authorities to curb acts of violence and criminality in areas surrounding the refugee camps and settlements. Communication equipment and vehicles are being supplied to the Kenyan police. Particular attention was paid by UNHCR to addressing the problems of sexual violence against women refugees. Through a donor-funded project, firewood was provided for each refugee household in the Kenyan camps to avoid the need for refugee women to go out in search of fuel wood in the surrounding areas of the camp and risk becoming victims of roving bandits. A private foundation made funds available to UNHCR to provide outreach and counselling services for refugee women who were survivors of sexual violence. The statistics on the incidence of reported sexual violence against refugee women fell drastically as a result of those measures. Refugee women in the United Republic of Tanzania benefited from a contribution towards establishing a special project to counter sexual violence against women. The project aimed at strengthening the ability of the law enforcement agency to prosecute accused persons and to provide training for the local police force and counselling services for victims.

33. The WFP programme in the Sudan provided close to 47,000 tons of food aid to 138,000 Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees, while nearly 125,000 tons were provided to an estimated 2.36 million internally displaced persons affected by war and drought (valued respectively at $25.5 million and over $142 million). In Ethiopia, over 91,000 tons of food were supplied to 263,000 refugees, while over 45 tons were provided to 272,000 internally displaced persons. The estimated value was over $43 million and over $24 million, respectively. Other important programmes of WFP were in Kenya, where 182,000 refugees received over 77,000 tons of supplies (at an estimated cost of $41 million) and in Uganda, where programmes for refugees and for internally displaced persons totalled over 100,000 tons valued at over $60 million.

34. For its part, UNICEF provided over $1.2 million worth of assistance to internally displaced persons in camps and host communities following the latest border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia. This included high-protein supplementary foods for children under five, pregnant and lactating women. Health needs were met by the provision of essential supplies. In addition, an assessment of the psycho-social needs of deported and displaced children and their families is currently under way. In Ethiopia, similar assistance in areas of health, water supply, sanitation and shelter has been provided to persons displaced through the conflict, in addition to supporting basic primary education,

training field workers in psycho-social management and providing support to separated and unaccompanied children.

35. As part of efforts to secure sustainable return and reintegration, UNDP has implemented a rural rehabilitation programme in Somalia. This $30 million programme is being implemented through over 700 sub-projects in the economic, environment and social sectors in five separate regions of the country. In addition, working with Somali counterparts, United Nations agencies, UNHCR and United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), with non-governmental organizations and with donors, UNDP is developing a comprehensive reintegration framework that will provide support for the rehabilitation needs of returnees in the host communities to which they will return.

4. Southern Africa

36. Nearly 300,000 refugees, returnees and asylum-seekers live in countries in the southern Africa region. They are, in general, persons of rural background residing in villages and settlements, the largest single group being Angolans, located mainly in Zambia (150,000). Civil conflicts raging in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have again had a heavy impact on the situation. New refugee emergencies have occurred in Zambia, with the arrival of some 25,000 Congolese refugees as of mid-June, and in Botswana with the influx of Namibians from the Caprivi region.

37. Protection has continued to be a major component of UNHCR activities in the region, with constant efforts to ensure that refugee status procedures function correctly and that refugees are treated in accordance with international principles and standards. Urban asylum-seekers and refugees throughout the region, although relatively few in number, have come to represent a critical issue for many countries. Increasingly restrictive policy and legal measures, along with worrying signs of xenophobia, have led to serious security, legal, social and economic problems for urban asylum-seekers and refugees. For those for whom voluntary repatriation is not feasible, the main objective of UNHCR has been to facilitate an enabling environment for local integration.

38. In Angola, where security conditions are critical, an important role has been played by the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola in assisting the United Nations and other international relief agencies in setting up and monitoring security arrangements and providing escorts to humanitarian convoys. Many of those tasks were related to the influx of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The civilian police component of the Mission also monitored, to the extent possible, the disarming of the civilian population in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in order to reduce prevailing insecurity, which affected the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

39. WFP activities in Angola have concerned both internally displaced persons (close to 540,000 persons) and war-affected persons throughout the country. WFP supplied 80,000 tons of food at a total cost of over $63 million. The situation of the population remains alarming, with increased malnutrition and epidemics such as polio, malaria, meningitis and cholera. UNICEF and its partners have responded with a mass immunization campaign covering over 600,000 children in accessible areas. UNICEF has also distributed relief supplies to thousands of families in besieged towns, such as Huambo and Luena, and to those who have fled to Luanda and its surroundings. School kits have been distributed and teachers have been trained to begin education activities. The threat of newly laid landmines is being addressed through a revived mine awareness campaign supported by UNICEF.

5. North Africa

40. There has been little change in the refugee situation throughout North Africa, where UNHCR has continued to provide basic care and assistance to refugees in countries of the region, pending voluntary repatriation and other long-term solutions. The slow process of implementation of the United Nations settlement plan in Western Sahara caused further delays in UNHCR preparatory activities for the repatriation of Saharawi refugees. However, a joint mission with the Government of Morocco took place in June 1999 to assess needs, including infrastructure required for reintegration and rehabilitation. A draft plan of action for the implementation of the cross-border confidence-building measures was submitted to the Security Council and the parties in July 1999 for their approval.

41. Following talks between the parties involved in the Western Sahara territory dispute, in its resolution 1238 (1999) of 13 May 1999, the Security Council permitted the resumption of the identification process for the contested tribes and the commencement of the appeals process for those Western Saharawis who had been rejected by the United Nations Identification Commission. This, in turn, enabled UNHCR offices in Algeria and Mauritania to resume the registration of identified eligible voters/refugees, with a view to possible repatriation in March 2000 to participate in a referendum planned for July 2000. Close cooperation is being maintained with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, which is responsible for certain key activities linked to those preparations.

C. Inter-agency cooperation

42. In addition to the many examples given in the preceding regional overview, inter-agency cooperation has been of particular note in a number of specific areas.

1. Security

43. Partnership with United Nations peacekeeping operations has been an important factor in helping to ensure the physical security of refugees and address the preoccupations of host countries. That partnership, also shared with Member States, has been particularly helpful in efforts to maintain the security and humanitarian character of refugee camps and settlements. As part of those efforts, UNHCR has on several occasions had to move the location of refugee populations away from border areas.

2. Sustainable return

44. Another area where inter-agency collaboration has been noteworthy is that of measures to ensure sustainable return. Refugees returning home after conflicts all too often find themselves in situations of fragile peace, within communities left divided and torn. It is therefore essential to avoid the dangerous gap between the provision of humanitarian assistance and that of longer-term development cooperation. To bridge such a gap, UNDP is providing support to emerging governance and administrative structures at the community, district and regional levels, in both rural and urban settings. UNDP programmes fall into three primary areas of activity: area-based economic and social assistance; reintegration support for specific target groups; and technical assistance and capacity-building for key institutions.

45. In July 1999, a workshop on repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of refugees was jointly organized by UNHCR and other United Nations agencies, in Hargeisha, capital of north-west Somalia. Its purpose was to examine issues relating to post-conflict reconstruction by assessing needs and establishing linkages between repatriation, rehabilitation and the reintegration of returnees and internally displaced persons.

3. Access to populations of concern

46. To strengthen support to African countries coping with large numbers of refugees, returnees and displaced persons, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has increased its field presence in a number of countries, *inter alia*, in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Burundi, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Uganda. It has also focused particular efforts on advocating for safe and unhindered access to affected populations. This was notably the case in Angola, where the Office promoted the creation of operational guidelines, approved by the Government and accepted by both parties, as a basis for negotiations for cross-line delivery of humanitarian assistance. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, following negotiations with the Government and rebel authorities, principles of engagement for humanitarian assistance were endorsed by both the Government in Kinshasa and the opposition as a precondition for humanitarian aid, setting out the basic operational guarantees of security and access for humanitarian organizations.

47. Similar initiatives have been taken in Sierra Leone, where the Office promoted an agreement with the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front. The first United Nations inter-agency mission to rebel-held areas in the country was launched on 7 July 1999, followed by the establishment of an operational presence.

48. In June 1999, the United Nations launched its first humanitarian mission to the Sudan's Nuba Mountain region in more than a decade, in an effort to assess the needs of people in the rebel-held territory. At a meeting of the Technical Committee on Humanitarian Assistance, co-chaired by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, an agreement for the implementation of rail and road cross-line corridors was signed by the Government of the Sudan and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army.

4. Coordination of resources

49. In support of resource mobilization for humanitarian activities of United Nations agencies, significant progress was made in strengthening the consolidated appeals process, in particular by enhancing the capacity of country teams to manage and implement the process through training and workshops. For 1999, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs launched, on behalf of humanitarian organizations, consolidated inter-agency appeals for nine African countries, with programmes for a total of $697,322,694 to target over 11 million beneficiaries. As at 20 April 1999, close to $140 million had been raised. The response level, however, has differed greatly from one country to the other and the lack of adequate funding continues to hamper the effectiveness of the United Nations agencies' response in several countries.

50. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, through its Integrated Regional Information Network for Africa, with offices in Abidjan, Nairobi and

Johannesburg, supported coordination efforts by facilitating wider access to information, in particular from regional sources, and promoting information exchanges among personnel from United Nations agencies and departments, non-governmental organizations and international organizations, donor countries, Governments, academia and the media.

5. Unaccompanied minors

51. UNHCR, UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights cooperated in monitoring, collecting and sharing information on unaccompanied children. Discussions were held at the first African Conference on the Use of Children as Soldiers, hosted by the Government of Mozambique in April 1999. Through cooperation with partners that included UNHCR, UNICEF and relevant non-governmental organizations, the situation of those children was raised with States parties. (Other relevant information is to be found in the report on the implementation of resolution 53/122 (A/54/285).)

D. Cooperation with regional and subregional bodies

1. Organization of African Unity

52. UNHCR has continued to advocate the accession of African States to the 1969 OAU Convention. Material and financial assistance have been provided to support the proper functioning of structures in charge of refugee affairs in countries of asylum, in order to allow Governments to better assume their international responsibilities.

53. As regards internal displacement in Africa, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights undertook a number of initiatives with particular emphasis on working with regional and subregional organizations in addressing the assistance, protection and development needs of internally displaced persons. They included support for the organization of regional seminars and workshops on those issues.

2. Southern African Development Community

54. Cooperation with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has centred on two SADC initiatives that concern disaster preparedness and peacekeeping operations. A major military/civilian exercise was held in South Africa in April 1999 to enhance the region's peacekeeping capabilities. UNHCR participated actively in the elaboration of the humanitarian aspects of the exercise. SADC also played a prominent role in the Democratic Republic of the Congo peace process and became increasingly involved in conflict resolution in both southern Africa and East Africa. To help SADC further in that process, UNHCR committed financial support to the SADC peace process and played an active role in ensuring the formulation of the agreement on guiding humanitarian principles, which is part of the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

III. Conclusion

55. Problems caused by human displacement in Africa continue to be a source of concern for the United Nations, requiring coordinated action by UNHCR and other agencies concerned. This is particularly true at a time when major emergencies elsewhere have tended to draw the world's attention and to make heavy claims on available resources.

56. While acknowledging the serious situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa, there have been some encouraging signs in recent months that problems could be solved. The 1999 summit of OAU witnessed a spirit of openness and determination to find such solutions. The ceasefire agreements in Sierra Leone, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the Framework Agreement in the dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia are all important indicators of that trend.

57. Yet the lasting success of such agreements, as well as solutions in other conflict situations that continue to be a major cause of population movements, will require a renewed commitment by African Governments to take their future, and the future of their peoples, more resolutely into their own hands. Lasting solutions to problems, including refugee problems, can only come through negotiations rather than force. This determination is a fundamental precondition for international support. The international community, for its part, must do all in its power to back such efforts.